

THE CHURCH AND ITS OFFICERS.

BY J. W. REER.

In the beginning the Apostles of Christ were the embodiment of his church. They were his disciples—members of his body and subjects of his kingdom. They were deacons (servants), serving in temporal as well as spiritual things. They were presbyters (elders), or bishops, having the oversight of the church. They were evangelists (publishers of glad tidings) to preach the gospel of the kingdom, to organize churches, and to exercise an earnest care for the peace, purity and prosperity of all the churches. And in addition to all this as the Apostles of Christ they were blessed with extraordinary gifts and powers by which they were enabled to "speak with tongues," perform miracles in the name of Christ, and by the imposition of their hands to confer these gifts on others. In short, they stood as the plenipotentiaries of Jesus Christ to represent him and his cause, with plenary authority to do anything that was necessary for the complete establishment and perpetuity of his kingdom.

In the prosecution of their work, when the favorable time and opportunity came, so that the church could appreciate the propriety of the action, they proposed the election and appointment of officers to relieve them of part of their labor and responsibility. This commenced with the election of deacons at Jerusalem, and ended with the ordination of bishops, which, in the language of Ignatius, were "appointed unto the utmost bounds of the earth," as far as christian churches were established. By the time that the apostles of Christ were ready to cross the river, this work was completed, so that the church was organized for any work, and competent to perform any duty. When the last Apostle had passed over, the body of Christ was as complete as it was at any time when they were all alive. In the intervening time we find a class of christian laborers at work to which I have referred already, and of whom I now wish to treat more fully. These are

EVANGELISTS.

An Evangelist is "a messenger of good news; a bearer of good tidings."—Grove. We first find it applied to Philip, in Acts 21:8, on this wise: "And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came to Cesarea; and we entered into the house of Philip, the evangelist, which was one of the seven." Philip had preached and baptized in Samaria. He also preached Jesus unto the Ethiopian eunuch and baptized him. Afterward he "was found at Azotus; and passing through he preached in all the cities till he came to Cesarea." Here, it seems he stopped and made his home. He was a preacher of the gospel, and in this sense he might be called "the evangelist," or "bearer of good tidings." But it seems to me that this does not exhaust the meaning of the term as applied to him. It occurs to me that there was an evangelistic office as there was a Diaconate; and as he was once elected and appointed a deacon, so he was afterwards made an evangelist. I admit that there is no direct account of it, but, I think, circumstances warrant the conclusion. Let us leave "Philip, the evangelist," at Cesarea, awhile, and see whether we can find the office of evangelist.

In Eph. 4:11, we have this language: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." Here evangelists are classed with other officials, and as having special functions, requiring special gifts. I hold that the term is here used in an official sense, for two reasons: (1.) As all christians are "bearers of good tidings," if the term is not used officially, "there would be no propriety in making a distinction between evangelists and any other class of christians," and especially apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers; for these are all "messengers of good news." (2.) The term is here used in connection with other official names, and in contrast with them. I hold, therefore, that we have found the office, and will pass to the next and only remaining use of the term in the New Testament.

In 2 Tim. 4:5, we read, "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." As Timothy was to "do the work of an evangelist," evangelists have a work, and Timothy was an Evangelist.

But one will say, "Did you not claim that Timothy was the Bishop of the church at Ephesus? If so, how could he also be and 'do the work of an evangelist?' Or, to reverse it, it is certain that he was to 'do the work of an evangelist,' how then could he be bishop at the same time?" Yes, I see; it does seem that I am in a dilemma. But if an Apostle could be an apostle, and evangelist, and elder or bishop, and deacon, all at the same time, could not an evangelist be a Bishop at the same time? I see no difficulty in that. But it need not be contended that he was both at the same time at Ephesus. The facts seem to be these: Timothy was made an Evangelist by recommendation of "the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium" and "the laying on of the hands of the presbytery;" Acts 16:1-3, 1 Tim. 4:14. He became a co-laborer with the Apostle Paul, and was endowed with special gifts by the imposition of the hands of the latter. 2 Tim. 1:6. In all his journeys and labors with Paul, and under his directions, he was doing "the work of an evangelist." As such Paul left him at Ephesus, and afterwards wrote to him with reference to the work he should perform there, in and for that church; and how he should behave himself in the house of God and "do the work of an evangelist." But "the work of an evangelist," in any organized church where his services are needed, is the same as the work of a bishop in his own church. Timothy did "the work of an evangelist" so well, that when he resolved to make Ephesus his home, he became the bishop of the church, and continued the "good work" which, as an evangelist, he had so nobly begun. The difference, therefore, between "the work of an evangelist" and the "good work" of a bishop is, that the functions of the latter are local while those of the former are general. The Bishop is such only to his own church, but an evangelist performs the work of a bishop wherever his services are required.

Now you will take me back to "Philip, the Evangelist" and ask why he did not lay hands on those he baptized at Samaria. My answer is this, if the laying on of hands and prayer were practiced in connection with baptism and the confirmation of the disciples, Philip did attend to this work, for that purpose, whenever and wherever he baptized. It was for another purpose, the communication of extraordinary gifts, that Peter and John laid hands on them afterward. They were just as good before, but peradventure were more useful, in some respects, after the laying on of the hands of the apostles.

THE PROPHETIC OFFICE.

This was an extraordinary office, requiring special gifts, and was intended for extraordinary ends. It ceased with the gift of tongues and other extraordinary gifts and works. Prophets were not elected nor ordained to their work, but prophesied by special and miraculous endowment. The prophets are dead, except such as speak for the edification of the church. A person who is well versed in the history of the past and conversant with the present situation of things, may foretell some things with almost unerring certainty; but these are only guessing prophets. Most of us try our hands at this kind of prophecy, and sometimes we are nearly right. Students of prophecy sometimes particularize where the prophet only generalized, and they are about as successful as guessing prophets. We find some prophets among the Latter day Saints, but they are false prophets. Old Mother Ship-ton was about the only successful modern prophetess, and she missed some things a little. But let us pass on to

PASTORS AND TEACHERS.

These we find in Paul's classification in Eph. 4:11. These continue. Pastors are bishops or elders. But what will we do with teachers? It is certain that the apostles, evangelists, and pastors, were all teachers; but here are teachers spoken of in connection and in contrast with pastors, evangelists and apostles. I can scarcely avoid the conclusion that there was a class of teachers in the christian church whose duty it was to teach, either by teaching schools, or classes, or in the public congregation, or from house to house; who were teachers only, and did not concern themselves with the intricacies of church government, and with the organization of churches. They taught Christian doctrine and duty. This is a question of great importance; and while I am well assured that there was not a regularly graded ministry, consisting of the first, second, third and fourth degree; yet I do not see why there might not have been three or four classes of teachers with duties somewhat different. But a teacher could become an evangelist without passing through the diaconate, or eldership. There are good teachers, who are not competent to serve as deacons or elders, and certainly not as evangelists (in the official sense), and why may they not teach? If a person cannot do one kind of work, why may he not do another? If a man cannot build an engine, why may he not cast the wheels? If a brother cannot be a bishop or a deacon, why may he not preach or teach if he can? There were teachers in the apostolic age, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ;" and why not have them now? Teaching is not like prophecy, and gifts of healing or of tongues. These served their day and passed away, but teaching must continue. Teaching is necessary to make disciples, and to instruct them afterward, and I ask once more, why not have good, efficient teachers appointed to this work?

I will now conclude my articles on this subject with a brief recapitulation.

I. APOSTLES OF CHRIST.—They were called, ordained and sent by Jesus Christ. They were his plenipotentiaries as set forth in the opening of this paper. They fulfilled their ministry and with them this office ended.

II. PROPHETS. These, too, did their work, passed away, and the office passed away with them.

III. APOSTLES OF THE CHURCHES. These are messengers of the churches, and are of two kinds, and may be distinguished as follows:

1. Special Messengers.—These are sent to attend to some special business; and when the work is done, the appointment ends.

2. Evangelists. These are sent by recommendation of the churches and the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. They have full authority to preach the gospel, organize churches, and to set in order things that are wanting in the churches: in short, to do, wherever their services are necessary, what a bishop may do in his local church.

IV. DEACONS.—They are elected by the church, and ordained by prayer and the laying on of hands. It is their duty to take charge of the temporalities of the church. They should be the trustees of all church property, and the stewards to attend to all the financial business of the church. If charters are to be secured they are the proper parties to attend to the business. They are the overseers of the poor and the servers of tables. There is no office in the church the faithful and proper performance of which requires more wisdom, more honesty, and more "pure and undefiled religion."

V. ELDERS (Presbyters), OR BISHOPS.—These are carefully selected, according to 1 Tim. 3:1-8, and ordained with prayer and the laying on of the hands of the presbytery or of evangelists. A bishop is the President, or head, of a college of elders. In other respects they are the same. They are the overseers and pastors of the flock; and their functions are local, unless they are made apostles, of the church or evangelists.

VI. TEACHERS.—These I regard as distinct officers, whose duty it is to preach and teach wherever they have an opening. They have a great work, but are neither deacons, elders, or evangelists.

Besides the officers here named, I know of none other in the apostolic age. In the official nomenclature of the New Testament there are some other appellations, as "helpers," "governments," &c., but they are all applied to the officers above referred to. By whatever name they may be known, and we know they need not always be known by the same name,—the church will ever need evangelists, bishops, elders, teachers and deacons; and no church is apostolic without them. We have all of these in the Brethren church, but some, no doubt are a little irregular in their appointment. Of the election and ordination of officers I may have something to say in a future paper, but for the present I close, praying that the Lord may bless us all and keep us ever faithful.

Lathrop, Cal.

To Young Men.

The road up-hill may be hard, but at any rate it is open, and they who set stout hearts against a stiff hill shall climb it yet. What was hard to bear will be sweet to remember. If young men would deny themselves, work hard, live hard, and save in their early days, they need not keep their noses to the grindstone all their lives as many do. Let them be teetotalers for economy's sake. Water is the strongest drink; it drives mills; it's the drink of lions and horses, and Sampson never drank anything else. The beer, wine and tobacco money will soon build a house and make their fortune.

Never be cast down by trifles. If a spider breaks his web twenty times, twenty times will he mend it. Make up your mind to do a thing and you will do it.

Filled with the Spirit.

A man filled with the Spirit dwells much with the Scriptures. Peter quoted scripture at the day of Pentecost, when he was full of the Holy Ghost. What is a man good for who has no weapon? We don't know how to use this sword; we should get into the habit of using it. David says, "Thy word have I hid in my heart,"—a good thing in a good place for a good purpose. If you lose your health you lie upon your bed, and feed upon the word of God. When you meet together to dine, it is better to bring out the Bible than to bring out wine. I was glad in England at seeing that done in a great many houses of the upper classes.—Moody.

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN.

BY L. SLOTT.

I have read with much interest the discussions on the above subject published in the EVANGELIST. If you will excuse a few words of introduction I will be much obliged. Ever since I have sought earnestly to know "the will of God concerning us," my prayer has been that God by his spirit would enlighten my understanding so that I might see clearly those things pertaining to our salvation. Rev. N. H. Axtell, D. D., says, Man has a capacity for spirit-union with God. There is a spirit in man, a basis upon which the Almighty giveth him understanding. Thus far (I am happy to say) that highly appreciated comfort, though sometimes waited for, has not been denied me. And that the illustrations presented to my mind during such meditations were accompanied by the Spirit of God, I believe with an unwavering faith. It has been said, we are creatures of circumstance; be that as it may or what has been the cause of the different decisions regarding some of those matters, we do know that no one has a right to say anything but that which he knows, or has a reason to believe; consequently I can only speak for myself, and grant others the same privilege. A few years ago, during a series of meetings, I was thinking much about the responsibilities of christians, and the causes for so few accepting Jesus at his word; when, as is always the case, the imperfections of those professing Christ, loomed up higher than all else; and to my surprise and satisfaction of mind, on that occasion the Unpardonable Sin was simplified, as follows: "A rich man out of good will to the people, prepared a feast in his own house, and invited all to come and partake freely. Some came, went in and found the meal as represented; others came, but for reasons best known to themselves, only lingered about, refusing to enter; and others still, slighted the invitation altogether, by giving it no attention. At the sight of so much indifference, the good host began to wonder and inquire as to the cause, when, to his astonishment, he learned that his act of kindness was by many not appreciated, by others misconstrued; others again, (the majority were of this class) waited for words of appreciation from those who had partaken, and failing to hear any, became faithless and suspicious; but imagine, if you can, the sorrow of his soul, when he became aware of the fact that one had even been so wicked and ungrateful as to go in and partake, and after having enjoyed the benefits of the feast as well as the kindness of his host, turned again and said to those outside. There is no feast prepared, it has all been a delusion! Think for a moment, if that was a man of good reputation, how his story must have bewildered the minds of those inquirers! Spiritualize this, place yourself in the host's stead a little while, and I think you will readily see that the "unpardonable sin" is to be guarded against in these as well as in ancient times. I don't feel afraid that I shall ever deny that the Lord has a continual feast prepared for his children, but I do feel sometimes as having been most ungrateful, for not having testified more frequently as to its excellencies.

Complaining Women.

If an observing person were to make a broad generalization of the mental attitude of the majority of American women, he would say that it was characterized by a strong disposition toward complaint. If he were an old man, or one whose vigor of life was spent in the last generation, he would say that in this respect women have degenerated sadly. The causes of the tone of melancholy dissatisfaction may be attributed in part to a lack of physical strength; to the flavor of the air about us in this transition period in politics or religion. If he were less charitable in his judgments of people he would say that it is caused more frequently by self-indulgence than anything else, and would argue that it is a disease susceptible of cure. We do complain too much! It has certainly come to this, that one of the rarest characters in society is that of the woman who "takes things as they come," and labors to make the best of them. Our children catch the inspiration of our discontent, and are injured by it. A visitor to a kindergarten remarked the other day that almost every child in the room pouted if a wrong stitch were taken, or a wrong stroke of the pen given. It is usual to attribute the ills spoken of here to a strain upon the nerves, but in how few cases is there any justifiable strain. It is rarely a strain for food, or for clothing, or the schooling of the children that knits the brow of the mother of to-day. Let any woman who reads these words look into her own heart and answer with honesty the question, "What is it that gives me the greatest anxiety every day? Why is my brow clouded and my spirit not serene?"